

## 9/29/2008 This Week in Congress

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September 29, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

### House Rejects Financial Bailout

Just a few moments ago, the U.S. House rejected a \$700 billion financial industry bailout plan designed to resolve the credit crisis in our financial markets. Congress remained in session over the weekend to finalize the bill. Though improvements were made to add some taxpayer protections and additional Wall Street accountability, the Administration's original proposal remained largely intact. The final legislation would have authorized the Secretary of Treasury to purchase up to \$700 billion in troubled assets - mostly mortgage-related securities - from financial institutions, to be sold at a later time. The Treasury Department would also establish a federally-backed insurance program for holders of troubled assets to be financed by assessing premiums on participants.

I voted against this bill, but I expect some version of this legislation to be considered in a few days. Clearly, our country is facing very difficult economic times. We have known there was a day coming when there would be consequences to the amount of debt on the books of individuals, corporations and our nation. While I want to take every step to avoid everyday Kansans from suffering the consequences of problems on Wall Street, I am opposed to legislation which brazenly shifts the burden of risk from Wall Street to taxpayers. This legislation authorizes an increase in our national debt to \$11.3 trillion dollars. There is no moral high ground in requiring another generation of Americans to pay for our failures, with interest. Moreover, the plan does not provide the fundamental reforms to our economy needed to avoid additional problems from occurring.

In a rush to action, I am disappointed the Administration and Congress did not adequately consider alternatives to unprecedented government intervention that will affect the nature of our economic system and the lives of generations for years to come.

No elected official likes to be in a situation where there are no good options. I do not discount that the Kansans I care about and represent in Congress are going to face more difficult times. I think this is true with or without this legislation. There are consequences to years of a growing burden of debt. This legislation might have postponed the consequences but would not have eliminated them. I fully expect more financial problems to occur during the next few months. In Kansas, interest rates will rise and retirement balances will fall. Many lives will be impacted - but today's bill provided false hope.

During this past week, I appreciate the hundreds of comments from Kansans who have contacted me on this issue.

Discussing the State of the Economy with Kansas Bankers

In the midst of national conversations about the health of the economy, I invited several dozen Kansas bankers to join me on a conference call. I hosted the call in order to learn from bankers about the condition of the Kansas economy. Those I spoke with reported they were making some lending adjustments, though, all remained confident that Kansas banks are strong. Thanks to those who joined the call: Earl McVicker of Hutchinson; Mike Stevens of Sublette; Joe Kennedy of Frankfort; Don LaKamp of Great Bend; Bill Robbins of Great Bend; Robert Munson of Junction City; Mike Daniels of Manhattan; Ken Domer of Spearville; Dwayne Ramsey of Scott City; Craig Meader of Waverly; Lloyd Davidson of Salina; Bruce Benyshek of Salina; John Englebert of Norton; Clark Renfro of Salina; Larry Britegam of Salina and Norman Nelson of Norton.

### Announcing Funding for Military Projects

There was good news to report this week for Dodge City, Fort Riley and the Salina area. The House passed funding for military projects in each of these areas through the Defense and Military Construction spending bills for Fiscal Year 2009.

The legislation approves funding for a new U.S. Army Reserve Center in Dodge City. Funding also provides more than \$150 million for military construction projects at Fort Riley and includes a significant increase in funding for veterans care, including an increase to the mileage reimbursement rate for veterans traveling to VA facilities in this area. [Click here to read about the Fort Riley projects.](#)

Also, the Salina area received funding that will provide resources for Saline County road improvements, fund the Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) Mission Planning and Operation Center, improve the support facility at Smoky Hill Range and supply equipment at Smoky Hill Range. [Click here to read more about the projects in Salina.](#)

National security remains a top priority and this funding will provide our service men and women with updated resources so that they may continue to improve our homeland defense.

Rural Veteran Health Care Legislation to Become Law: This week the House and Senate approved legislation I introduced to establish a pilot program in several rural regions of the country to give veterans a choice to receive care in their local communities rather than traveling long hours to Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities. This legislation was approved as part of a large veteran's health package that is now before the President to be signed into law. Though my bill was slightly modified to include only currently enrolled veterans or veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan in the program, its approval is great news for veterans in rural Kansas who will soon have more health care opportunities. Kansans veterans qualify if they live at least 60 miles from a VA primary care facility like an outpatient clinic, 120 miles from a VA hospital or 240 miles from a VA specialized care facility when seeking that care. [Click here to read more.](#)

#### House Votes to Recognize Honor Flight

This week, I welcomed another Honor Flight to Washington. A group of veterans from Allen County came to our nation's capital on a one-day, all-expense-paid trip to see the Memorial that pays tribute to their service and sacrifice. Special thanks to Bill Shirley of Iola for organizing the trip and the other volunteers for making the visit possible. [Click here to view photos from this week's trip.](#)

Also this week, the House of Representatives passed legislation I authored that commends Honor Flight, its volunteers and donors for enabling World War II veterans to travel to our nation's capital to view the World War II Memorial built in their honor. The resolution also recognizes former Senator Bob Dole, a wounded veteran of World War II, for leading the fundraising campaign to build the Memorial and for his efforts to promote and support Honor Flight.

Honor Flight works against time to thank our World War II veterans for their service. Each day, hundreds of heroes from

the greatest generation pass. Of the 16 million that served, it is estimated that only 2.5 million are alive today. Many World War II veterans are in their 80s and 90s and unable physically or financially to visit our nation's capital to see the World War II Memorial for themselves. Honor Flight helps make trips for these veterans possible.

### Supporting Health Insurance Coverage for Maximum Hospital Stay

This week, legislation passed in the House of Representatives that I sponsored which authorizes health insurance companies to cover the maximum amount of hospital days for patients who are recovering from mastectomy or breast surgery. It has been reported that doctors across the country have been required to discharge patients within a few hours of their surgery because health insurance does not cover a stay in the hospital for this procedure.

This legislation, the Breast Cancer Patient Protection Act of 2007, would eliminate that early discharge of patients, ending the so called "drive through mastectomy." It ensures that patients are covered by their insurance providers for the necessary number of days in order to properly recover. I supported this legislation last Congressional session and was glad to see it successfully pass in the House. This legislation has been sent to the Senate for consideration. [Click here to read more.](#)

### Visiting USDA to Discuss Farm Bill Implementation

This week I visited the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and discussed a number of issues surrounding implementation of the 2008 Farm Bill with Deputy Secretary Chuck Conner and Secretary Ed Schafer's Chief of Staff Dale Moore, a Kansan. Among the many topics discussed were the permanent disaster program, Average Crop Revenue Election (ACRE) program, and denial of payments to producers with farms having ten base acres or less. The Deputy Secretary informed me of the challenges USDA is facing as it attempts to write regulations and we discussed different areas that could benefit from technical corrections.

I urged the Deputy Secretary to ensure that USDA uses its authority to craft regulations to maintain an effective safety net for farmers. For instance, the permanent disaster program should be implemented to incorporate a revenue guarantee that effectively represents on-farm revenues without penalizing the use of crop insurance. I also discussed how the crop insurance requirement provisions of the permanent disaster title could be improved. Specifically, we discussed the provision that requires farmers to purchase Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policies for grazing lands under the crop disaster provisions, which do not provide assistance to forage losses on rangeland. I asked that USDA keep me informed as the regulation writing process progressed.

### Small Businesses Keep Kansas Communities Strong

Small businesses are the backbone of the Kansas economy. Walk down any Main Street and you will find hard working men and women who own and operate businesses the community depends on. From agriculture to health care, small businesses provide the products and services we need to maintain our way of life and prosper.

This week, I was honored to be named a Guardian of Small Business by the National Federation of Independent Business, which is a nonpartisan organization that represents small businesses. The award is given to Members of Congress that vote for legislation that keeps small businesses in business. I appreciate the investments made by individuals trying to achieve the American dream and provide for their families. I will continue to support legislation that strengthens our small businesses. [Click here to read more about the award.](#)

### Attending Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Meetings

On Thursday, I attended a hearing of the Subcommittee on Aviation on runway safety at our nation's airports. Last year, the nation's air traffic control towers handled a total of 63.1 million flights. During that time a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that the number of runway incursion at our airports was 6.05 incidents per million operations. The report found that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) National Runway Safety Plan was out of date. The report cited controller fatigue, delays in runway safety deployment, and ramp area safety as areas that needed to be improved. During the hearing, I listened to experts in the field on how to improve this situation. I will continue to work with the Committee to improve our nation's runways so that they are as safe as they can be.

#### Visiting Ash Grove Cement Company

On my way to Washington, D.C., this week, I stopped in Overland Park to visit Ash Grove Cement Company. Ash Grove is the nation's sixth largest cement manufacturer and operates cement plants in nine states including one in Chanute, Kansas. The company's products are used to construct highways, bridges and many other structures necessary for commerce and living. Thanks to Chairman of the Board Charlie Sunderland, Vice Chairman and Secretary of the Board Kent Sunderland and President Charles Wiedenhoft for visiting with me and Director of Communications and Public Affairs Jackie Clark for arranging the visit.

#### In the Office

Roger and Tonia Carlson of Paxico, Rita Jones and John Kirgan of Gardner, Neil Robertson of Leawood, Ryann Summerford of Merriam, Sue Jirkovsky-Landers of Tecumseh, Gay Cornell of Coffeyville and Lisa Benlon of Overland Park were in with the American Cancer Society to tell me about the need to increase research funding at the National Institutes of Health. Mark Farr of Nickerson, Verlean Brown of Wichita and Todd Roberts of Emporia were in with the Kansas NEA to discuss the importance of addressing the economic crisis. Sister Therese Bangert of Kansas City was in with the Kansas Catholic Conference to learn about recent efforts of the House Hunger Caucus, which I co-chair.

Bob Henderson, Daphne Maxwell, Ronald Walker were in with the National Association of Federally Impacted Schools to talk about the increased demand for educational services and infrastructure due to the growth of Fort Riley. Brennan Clouse, Shelbi Hall and Sarah Short of Goodland; Megan Sauber and Juanelle Garretson of Salina; and Melissa Hughes and Mallory Wetta of Tonganoxie were in with the Family Career and Community Leaders of America to share their support for increased funding for the Carl D. Perkins program, which supports technical and career education initiatives.

Kansas State Representative Tom Sloan of Lawrence was in to participate in a meeting with officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Rural Development to discuss how to expand broadband internet access in rural Kansas. Al Hinman of Olathe; Ron and Julie Hein and Shed Cunhay of Topeka; Scott Redler, Don Sayler, Bill Goodlatte, Michael Phipps and Gene Suellentrop of Wichita; Hugh O'Reilly of Emporia; and Don and Sabrina Symns of Hays were in with the Kansas Restaurant and Hospitality Association to talk about immigration reform and other issues important to the restaurant industry. Miriam Glueck of Leawood and Audrey Asher and Michael Lerner of Overland Park were in with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee to discuss recent developments in the Middle East.

Dick Carter and Becky Blake of Topeka, Sylvia Rice of Salina, Donna Price of Goodland, Karen Hibbard of Manhattan, Judy Billings of Lawrence, John Rolfe of Wichita and Jerry Cook of Overland Park were in with the Travel Industry Association of Kansas to tell me about legislation in Congress that would help promote the United States to tourists overseas. Eric Banks of Salina, who is the new Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Kansas State Conservationist, was in to brief me on his transition into the State Conservationist position and initiatives he plans to pursue in the coming year. Dennis Hupe of Topeka was in with the National Biodiesel Board to talk about the importance of renewing the tax credit for biodiesel.

Lila Fritschen of Hutchinson, who was named the Outstanding Older Worker for State of Kansas, was in to tell me about the benefits of Experience Works, an organization that seeks to improve the lives of older people through training, community service and employment. David Callanan, Derek Thompson, Cody Foster and Charles Lucius of Topeka and Mike Tripses of Overland Park were in with Advisors Excel to explain the potential consequences of a proposed Securities and Exchange Commission rule that would change the way certain annuities are regulated. Jessica Adams and Justin and Betsy Brownlee of Manhattan were in to visit, as were Chris and Sarah Green of Topeka.



Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol. Dee and Jerry Akers of Hays, Ron Ridley of Jetmore, Otis Toll of Morland, Ray Toll of Hoxie and Connie Gish of Hill City were in for a tour.

Very truly yours,

Jerry